

NAON Position Statement: Elder Care

Issue

Older adults represent the majority of people receiving nursing care in the United States at this time (Mezey, 2010). Elders often require orthopaedic care and will continue to be an increasing cohort in the health care arena. Quality health care for the elderly is a challenging task and utilizes a large component of health care resources across all settings: hospital, home, office, and outpatient. It is expected that the number of individuals 65 years of age or older will reach 20 percent of the United States population by the year 2030 (Mezey, 2010). By the year 2030, 1 in 5 individuals will be over the age of 65; 70 million individuals will be of this age. The number of elderly patients entering the health care system across all specialties and in all settings can be expected to grow accordingly.

Position

Orthopaedic nursing care of the elderly should be of sound quality, delivered in a coordinated fashion, utilizing expert orthopaedic and geriatric knowledge. Elder care should be evidence-based, comprehensive, patient-centered, holistic, and seamless across care settings in which orthopaedic nursing care is provided. Safety in care delivery should be a high priority. Attention to the biological, psychosocial, cultural, and spiritual needs of elders is required in the delivery of their nursing care. Orthopaedic elder care should be approached from an interdisciplinary perspective with an understanding and application of sound ethical principles. Orthopaedic nursing care policies should reflect an attempt to minimize suffering, allow for self-determination, and address the specific clinical syndromes, disease processes, and states of health common to the elderly population. The National Association of Orthopaedic Nurses (NAON) supports individual and organizational initiatives that deliberately focus on the unique health care needs of the elderly across all health care settings and specialties. Elder care is unique in the competencies required for quality care delivery. NAON supports the integration of educational programs dealing with the particulars of elder and orthopaedic care. NAON also recognizes the importance of incorporating specialty clinical experiences in the education of nurses for the care of elderly orthopaedic patients. These experiences should be available at the undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate levels of education. NAON promotes specialty certification for practicing nurses in both orthopaedics and geriatrics. NAON supports care delivery programs and policies, which emphasize *Caring Theory* as a foundational framework underpinning nursing practice. NAON supports the Hartford Institute for Geriatric Nursing's efforts and initiatives for the care of the elderly.

Background/Rationale

Orthopaedic health problems are common in the elderly. With growth in the elderly population, orthopaedic nurses will see more geriatric patients in the years to come. The unique health status of the elderly exists on a continuum, necessitating individualized care. It is well established that effective care of the elderly requires special knowledge and skill to be of substantial quality. This necessitates the integration of orthopaedic and geriatric knowledge. Professional nurses must recognize the impact of age on orthopaedic care. Age related changes of the musculoskeletal system include osteopenia, osteoporosis, sarcopenia, and weakening of tendons and ligaments (Smith & Cotter, 2008). The development of osteoarthritis, the occurrences of autoimmune, neuromuscular degenerative diseases, and trauma related injuries are also increased in the elderly population. Co-morbid medical conditions of the elderly often increase the complexity of care, and the need for multidimensional approaches. Additional areas of nursing emphasis in the care of the elderly include: medication interactions, falls, mental status changes, mobility issues, skin care, incontinence care, changes in the immune system, sensory changes, caregiver stress, nutrition, the ability to determine one's care needs and mechanisms to access supportive community resources. Interdisciplinary communication and attention to the transportation needs of the elderly are also concepts of importance to nurses caring for elders. These variables demonstrate the confounding problems in the nursing management of elderly adults. Issues of cost, quality, access, self-determination, provider education, and continuity of care provide opportunities for the elderly community, their caregivers, administrators, and policy makers to positively affect the outcomes of older adult orthopaedic care. Such concepts are of utmost importance in the care of the elderly and cannot be viewed in isolation when developing care plans for elderly orthopaedic patients. These issues will increasingly challenge the orthopaedic nursing workforce. The development of a work force with geriatric competence is essential to provide quality orthopaedic care for elderly patients. Recognizing these statements as factual, the need for orthopaedic nurses to integrate specialty and geriatric nursing knowledge together provides for high quality, safe care of the older adult patient.

References

- Mezey, Mathy. (2010) *Specialty nursing association global vision statement on care of the older adults*. Hartford Institute for Geriatric Nursing, New York University College of Nursing. Retrieved on May 23, 2010 from http://consultgerirn.org/uploads/File/REASN_Global_Vision_Statement.pdf
- Smith, C.M., Cotter, V.T. (2008). *Normal aging changes, nursing standard of practice protocol: Age-related changes in health*. Hartford Institute for Geriatric Nursing, New York University College of Nursing. Retrieved on May 23, 2010 from http://consultgerirn.org/topics/normal_aging_changes/want_to_know_more#item_8

Links for additional resources/information

Hartford Institute for Geriatric Nursing: www.hartfordign.org

Clinical Geriatric Resources: www.ConsultGeriRN.org

Nurses Improving Care for Healthsystem Elders: www.NICHEprogram.org

National Gerontological Nurses Association (NGNA) www.NGNA.org